

The Cooking Competence of Young Adult Couples, Residing in Tshwane, South Africa: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Introduction: A decline in cooking competence has become a global concern, and young adults do not seem to cook anymore. The decrease in cooking competence learning in schools, time pressures, and the change in lifestyle and societal norms are attributing factors and have given rise to the consumption of Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs). The high consumption of UPFs among young adults is concerning as it contributes to a decline in cooking competence, which is associated with low dietary value and poor health. This research aimed to contribute new information to the South African literature and to understand young adult couples' cooking competence better.

Methodology: An Ethnographical strategy of enquiry was used, where data was gathered through visual ethnography, semi-structured interviews, observations, personal documentation (i.e., food diaries), and photo-elicitation.

Results: The findings revealed a depreciation of teaching cooking competence-related subjects. A change in lifestyle and societal norms and time pressures were prevalent amongst participants, a significant factor influencing their cooking competence. The participants were high consumers of UPFs which can be linked to the decline in cooking competence.

Discussion: It was identified that participants had a unique set of cooking competencies, each within their own set of external factors. The cooking competence of the participants was interrelated and interdependent and formed part of a component of food literacy and contributes to an individual's food literacy. Based on the findings, an adapted cooking competence dimensions table was developed, and a new conceptual framework was proposed.

Conclusion: The significance of this research study was that it provided insight and understanding into the cooking competence of young adults in the South African setting.

The study was the first to develop a conceptual framework for young adult couples residing in Tshwane, and the proposed conceptual framework indicated that cooking competence is complex and intricate and can be considered a component of food literacy.

The methodology was unique in utilising visual ethnography to obtain data-rich information. The cooking competence dimensions table and conceptual framework could be tested on a larger part of the population or adapted towards other population groups to understand South Africans' cooking competence.